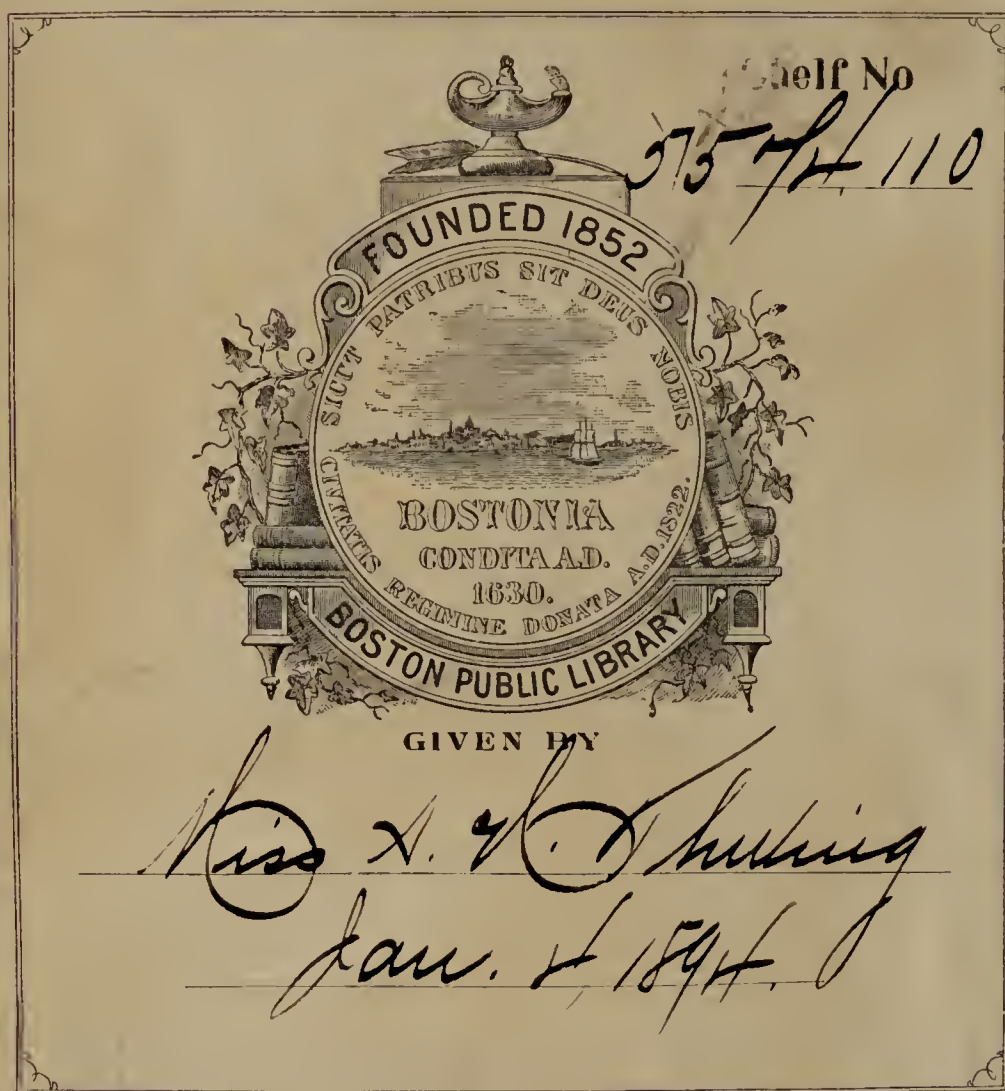


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## RESCUE WORK, NEW AND OLD.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE NEW GODIVA, AND OTHER STUDIES IN SOCIAL QUESTIONS."

*By the Author of "The New Godiva, and Other Studies in Social Questions."*

A Paper read at the Conference of the National Vigilance Association, held at Exeter Hall, March 18th, 1886.\*

THE difficulty, in these days of writers and speakers upon Rescue Work is the difficulty of those who have to handle a new thing under an old name. Rescue Work, as it has of late years begun to be understood, is something entirely different from what was known as Rescue Work in the past ; so much so, indeed, that the thing would almost seem to require re-naming. Nor is this difference a difference merely of *method*. It is not merely the difference between closed doors and open ones, between committees of gentlemen and individual mothering, between "*penitents*" and children like our children, between rigorous discipline and illimitable love. The difference is a difference of *principle*, of *spirit*, as well as of *method*. The whole difficult sphere of labour implied in the words Rescue Work has been transformed and transfigured by the light of new ideas, and it is these new *ideas*, these new *principles* which are so rapidly modifying the *processes* of the workers in this field.

Into the question of how this change has arisen it is not necessary to enquire at any length. Suffice it to say that it is one of many results (results whose social and national importance it would be impossible to over-estimate) of what has been called the "*Moral Revolution*" of the last fifteen or twenty years. We are all agreed that, to whatever causes the change may be owing, *the change exists*. No one that has had any experience at all of this department of labour can fail to be sensible of it. It is in the air, and it has for long afforded matter for deep thought and ardent discussion to all those interested in saving girls.

I would most carefully guard myself here from being understood to say that the old ideas had nothing in them that was sound, or that the old system had nothing in it that was redemptive ; just as I would, on the other hand, most earnestly deprecate the assumption that the new principles are unimpeachable and the new methods

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flawless. What we are at the present time called upon to do is to weigh, with the solemn and single-minded honesty of purpose due to the magnitude of the subject, the merits and demerits of both, the advantages and the drawbacks of the Old and the New Rescue Work.

And in order to make this duty clear, let me here briefly glance first at principles, comparing the new spirit with the old, and secondly at some practical attempts now being made to embody the new principles in action.

The first difference in principle which strikes us is, I think, this—that this work is no longer looked upon as a separate branch of work, a work that can be carried on in institutions and by individuals set apart for it, which institutions and individuals are not concerned with anything beyond their proper business—rescuing, receiving, and restoring our ruined girls. It is now seen to be, not a distinct thing, a thing by itself, but essentially a *part of a great whole*, even of that great national movement which, from small beginnings, culminated last summer in a mighty wave of popular indignation, in some much-needed legislation, and in the formation of a National Vigilance Association for the Repression of Criminal Vice and Public Immorality. Instead of being characterised by a rather special degree of isolation, an isolation beyond that of other departments of philanthropic labour, an isolation which seemed to betoken a kind of shudder at the painfulness of the work and a kind of apology for its hopelessness—instead of this, Rescue Work is now recognised as being inseparably bound up with the many vital reforms that go to make what I have referred to as the *Moral Revolution*, with *Preventive Work*, with *Vigilance Work*, with *Social Purity Work* in all its manifold branches. It is seen that it can no longer be carried on, apart from vigorous attack, offensive and defensive, on the causes which create the necessity for it. It is admitted that unless the minds of workers in this field become open to other aspects of the complicated problem with which they are dealing, their task will be but half done. It is acknowledged that unless their hearts become touched with new emotion, warmed and penetrated with an enthusiasm of which their predecessors knew and could know nothing, their efforts must fail to meet the requirements of a new era. Let me illustrate my meaning by a sentence from the last annual report of the “Bridge of Hope Mission and Ratcliff Highway Refuge,” St. George’s-in-the-East. The Honorary Superintendent, Miss Steer, whose name is probably familiar to all present as that of one whose life of laborious self-denial “among the poor girl waifs and strays, who hive in the courts and alleys of Shadwell and wander up and down the restless thoroughfare of Ratcliff Highway,” has largely altered the character of that once infamous neighbourhood, says:

"The larger work now going on, which is raising men and women to a higher and purer standard of life and thought, is as dear, nay, even dearer, to our hearts than the work in the little corner where our lives are spent, and in which, naturally, our thoughts centre." We have here the testimony of one of the most devoted and most efficient of those now carrying on Rescue Work on the new lines to the fact that her work, absorbing as it is, is but a fragment of what she calls the "*larger work*" of seeking to secure for *the entire community* "*a higher and purer standard of life and thought.*" And observe that the great movement, which in a hundred different directions aims at this final result, is "*as dear, nay, even dearer,*" to her heart than those particular labours in which she is so untiring and so eminently successful.

Another great change in principle which cannot, I think, fail to strike us is the importation into this work of the idea of *Justice*. When, some years ago, an impulse was given to Rescue Work (on the old lines), Refuges and Penitentiaries being founded in considerable numbers and placed under the charge of devoted women who had dedicated themselves to the service of the fallen, the idea that large numbers of these poor girls were merely sheep led to the slaughter, that a majority of them were more sinned against than sinning, that the rôle of "*penitent*" would be far more fitly played by the parents who had neglected them, the mistresses who had ill-used them, the men who had betrayed them, than by themselves—such an idea would seem to have occurred to no one. The very name "*penitent*," affixed indiscriminately to all of them is sufficient proof to the contrary. It spoke, in itself, of the old, ingrained habit of mind which concentrates its attention upon the woman-sinner, and does not take the participators of her guilt into account, which *practically* (whatever it may do in theory) regards sin as a blacker thing in the weaker than in the stronger party, and which lays upon the victim (too often) of thoughtless selfishness or horrible cruelty a burden of discipline and of expiation heavier than she can bear. The reaction from such an attitude of mind towards girls of this unhappy class has, undoubtedly, set in very strongly indeed, and there are probably few here who do not from their hearts rejoice that it is so. But here it behoves us to keep careful watch, lest, in abandoning what appears to us the over-severity of the "*penitential*" theory, we fall into the opposite error of treating, or appearing to treat, lightly what, rightly considered, is perhaps the gravest and most grievous of all sins. This is a problem which Rescue Workers will have to face in the future, and patiently work out the reconciling of a due abhorrence of this awful profanation of "*the temple of the body*" with the demands of justice and the hungry claims of pity.

Another new principle which is fast altering the whole character



of Rescue Work is the principle of *individualism*. What is known as the "*barrack-system*," the massing together of great numbers of human beings in large buildings, is rapidly falling into disfavour as a system, whether in the case of district schools, homes for children, boarding schools for girls, or what not. Even our public-school system seems not unlikely to be modified by the growing movement in favour of *individual treatment* and of *home influence*—both things necessarily minimised on the barrack plan. But of all the classes likely to be beneficially affected by this movement, there is not one in such urgent need of it, or one in which the best results follow more quickly from it, than the class with which we are just now concerned. The ranks of the fallen are swelled by recruits of widely varying character and disposition. Their circumstances are as diverse as their histories, their capacities often as unequal as the justice the world metes out to them. It is almost bewildering to us now to reflect that the attempt can ever have been made to deal with them *en masse*, herding them together for lengthened periods, drilling them like a regiment of soldiers, putting them—these poor, ill-matched, incompatible, heart-broken soldiers—into a sort of regimental uniform, and expecting from them an evenness of behaviour and a unanimity of aspiration corresponding with their outward garb. For the happy discovery of recent years is that it is *the heart of a mother or a sister*, not the incessant routine of work and services and reflection, reflection and services and work, that each poor soul—in her very different way—requires. And we now know the true attitude of their helpers to be not that of commanding officers disciplining troops, or jailers marshalling convicts,

"Marked, like sheep, with figures,"

but that of parents studying their children's idiosyncracies, marking the separate individuality of each, loving all alike, but *manifesting love in wholly different ways*, according to the exigencies of each particular case.

It will here be pleaded, and justly pleaded, on behalf of the old system that there are many instances among these girls of characters not amenable to love, but only to a strict, as it were, military, *régime*. Again, grave material difficulties in the way of reducing the principle of individualism to practice will occur to everyone. Here, too, we must seek to harmonise what was useful in the disciplinary method with our labours on the other lines, and, as regards practical difficulties, workers must effect the best compromise in the matter of division, classification, and individual treatment generally, that circumstances permit. As interest in the work spreads and deepens, as funds come in and workers increase in numbers, many existing objections to the separate dealing with each separate case will disappear.



But, passing at this point to the second branch of our subject—some practical aspects of Rescue Work in the present day—let us see how some of our best workers are at this moment carrying out this very principle of individual treatment in their daily labours. Miss Steer, of whose successful labours in East London mention has just been made, is a firm believer in this principle, upon which her work, in all its different departments, is based. She has a Refuge in Prince's Square, Ratcliff Highway; also a Mission House, where the lady-workers reside; a good Mission Hall, and a small Hospital; a Night Shelter in Cable Street, hard by; and a Training Home, for rough young girls and children snatched from the brink of ruin, in the Globe Road—accommodation in all for between 80 and 90 persons, including about 15 matrons and lady-helpers. She endeavours, as far as possible, to classify and to separate her cases, keeping girls, generally speaking, for a short time only in her Refuge, and then dealing with them according to the peculiar needs of character and circumstances, some being drafted on to other Homes or Refuges specially adapted to meet their particular requirements, others going straight to situations, others to their own friends, and so forth. But, in the case of almost all these girls, whatever the plan adopted in their case, Miss Steer is increasingly convinced that nothing but individual care, individual love, individual watchfulness, will be of any real avail. She feels, moreover, that this care and watchfulness must not be a thing of weeks or months, but must *extend over years*; and an important feature of her work, and that of her friends, and one on which she would lay the greatest stress, is the keeping up with girls in situations or in their homes, visiting them, corresponding with them, and generally taking care that they shall feel, not merely that they have been rescued by a pitying fellow creature, but that they are being loved by a constant friend. "Each poor soul," says Miss Steer's last Report, "is the centre to herself of a world of misery, the pathos of her story demanding a whole heart full of compassion." She inclines to think that Rescue Work will be more and more based on the small or cottage-home principle, and that more and more weight will be attached to separation of cases belonging to different categories and to classification generally. And while rejoicing, not merely in her important Preventive work, but also in much encouragement in connection with Rescue Work, she feels that she and her friends are yet but pioneers, who "must be content if a large amount of our work goes simply to build up a foundation of experience upon which others may work out larger results."

Another lady-worker, Miss Mackrell, writes in reply to a query whether she is not in favour of the modern system, and whether she has not found it eminently successful:—"You say you know I am in favour of the modern method, that is, '*love and liberty*,' or, more

properly, *should be*, for I fear there is much work done which is not worthy of the term. . . . I have a small Home in the East End, where I can take in four or five young girls. My object in starting this Home, when I commenced Rescue Work, was that I need not be obliged to ask a girl to go to perhaps the only Home that had a vacancy, or to one *not suitable to that particular girl*, or one *to which her nature could not respond*. So I opened this little Home that I might myself judge, after a few days, or may be weeks, what Home such and such a girl was suited for, whether a long Home would be best, or one for a short time, &c., and I am thankful to say the result has been most encouraging. Many girls have come to me who would not have gone *direct* into a Home, their whole nature revolting at the idea, but who, after a short period, have come to see that they might be helped by a Home, and have willingly gone. Then, I find some girls to whom a Home *would do far more harm than good*, and such, when possible, I endeavour to place in a situation. I do find ladies kind enough to help me. The young girl you ask me about, only fifteen, was such an one. A Home was the last place where she would have received any good, and her whole nature rebelled against it. A lady has kindly taken her as housekeeper's maid, and I trust she will do well."

This poor child of fifteen, it may be mentioned, was a country girl who came up to a situation in London in Christmas week, went out on the first day, was accosted, flattered, and detained until she was persuaded that it was too late to return, and so went to her doom. Her case was brought to the notice of Mr. Coote, organising secretary to this Association, and he sent her to Miss Mackrell. She was an orphan, foolish and wayward enough, but she had very respectable friends who dreaded the idea of a Penitentiary as much as she did. They, however, soon consented to leave themselves in the hands of Miss Mackrell, with the happy result above stated. This instance is one among hundreds, and is merely given to illustrate the success of the individual method, where the other, even had it been tried, would most certainly have failed.

Another lady, engaged in Rescue Work in the Borough, says:—"The class, circumstances, age, &c., of about twenty sisters I rejoice over are so varied it is difficult to write of them ; but most emphatically I would say the "love and liberty" system alone has induced the utterly crushed ones to leave the life of shame, and won back others from the brink. A few are in Homes still, some in service, others restored to their family. *The few I have known enter readily and conform to the rules of the strict Home have invariably left again, and lapsed into the old life.* A few evenings since we brought in five, and reasoned with them from 11 till 12 p.m. Each girl had a room of her own, to which we might have access ; but all were strongly



prejudiced against Homes by the past experience of one of the number. Loving, persevering, self-denying effort, *standing alongside the girl*, can and does succeed."

Those last words seem to be as good a summary of the modern method as one could desire. *Standing alongside the girl*, heart to heart, hand to hand—not regarding her as one of a class, one of a herd, but as a *personality*, infinitely important, infinitely pitiable.

The demand for work of this kind, wholly inspired by love, and guided not by fixed rule but by ready tact and common sense, is undoubtedly on the increase. A clergyman writing to Miss Steer after the agitation and legislation of the summer, says that he is expecting a police-raid on the bad houses in his parish, and, being anxious to give the inmates a chance, wishes to hear of a lady who would work amongst them. "Do you know," he writes, "any *lady*—not a sister or a deaconess—who would come here for six months, and try in a friendly way to get hold of poor girls? I want it to be *informal*—some one who will just work her way into the houses, and, *where she has made friends*, try and influence them towards another life."

The principle of complete *liberty*, not binding girls to remain for any fixed period, not locking them up within four walls, not allowing them to feel that any constraint, except a *self-imposed* constraint is being laid upon them, has been found to answer in many of the new Homes. The girls go about freely with a caretaker or two, are taken to church, or for a country ramble; go to tea at kind friends' houses, go in and out almost at will—of course, under proper though always unobtrusive supervision. One tender-hearted mother of a family of these waifs told me one day that a great point with her was a very cheerful evening, with music, and sometimes with a romp, which ill-natured critics might have been tempted to call *dancing*! She rejoiced to think that all youthful spirits, all mirth, all life had not been crushed out of her charges. She looked on this remaining youthfulness of heart as a happy foundation on which to build the goodly edifice of a pure, womanly life.

It is scarcely necessary to reiterate that there are certain cases where a very much higher degree of discipline, method, and severity are required; cases where the old Penitentiary system and something approaching to prison regulations seem alone likely to produce the hoped-for result. Here, again, the patient and wise temper will seek to engraft what is needed from the old methods upon the new. There are Homes—such, for instance, as the excellent "Guardian Asylum" at Bethnal Green, instituted in 1812—where very much good work is still done in what some of us would incline to call a somewhat old-fashioned way. It was here, by the way, that a lady-visitor was, the other day, touched to hear of the great affection

lavished by the inmates on some fowls kept in their little courtyard. "The interest and delight they take in them are wonderful," said the matron. It appeared that many of the girls had not previously connected eggs with hens! and all the new phenomena of the poultry yard so enchanted them, and they became so fond of their pets, that many would save up their own food for them. So the old-fashioned house, with its old-world air and bare dormitories, smacking of the Penitentiary, and narrow precincts beyond which these "*females who have deviated from the paths of virtue*" (as the Report says) never wander, is not without its touch of poetry, its sweet and humanising influences. A good proportion of "Guardian" cases turn out admirably.

A question closely connected with Rescue Work which is being much discussed at the present time is that of Night Shelters. Opinion is very general that these should be multiplied, and it would appear that a majority are in favour of the principle of *classification* being applied here to a greater extent than has been possible up to the present. A large building, with divisions, and a matron for each class of cases; several small houses, together, with a man and his wife in each; coffee palaces, open all night, with bedrooms upstairs, are among recent suggestions. Since September, 1885, Miss Steer has had over 500 sleepers in her Night Shelter. The danger threatening here is lest the shelter should degenerate into a mere casual ward. Many details, such as whether or no the shelters shall be made attractive, whether the same sleepers shall be re-admitted, and so forth, will require careful consideration.

A large field both for Rescue and Preventive Work seems to be opening in Workhouses, Infirmarys, and Hospitals. Personal experience in the Lock ward of a large London hospital points to the brightest hope for what is usually considered the most hopeless class among the fallen. Had circumstances permitted of a more thorough and sustained "*standing alongside the girl*," I have no hesitation in saying that a very large proportion of those whose friendship it was sought to gain would now date from that ward the beginning of a new life.

I have only to add the expression of my own deep conviction that Rescue Work, more than any other branch of human effort, requires to be done not by deputy, not in a perfunctory way, not in a spasmodic way, but with entire devotion of personal service and with the unflagging enthusiasm of a boundless charity. In a word, in order to do it well, we need not merely "to be Christians—but to be Christs."































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